Background

- The common cold is caused by viral pathogens, such as rhinovirus, parainfluenza, adenovirus, RSV, and influenza.
- Bacterial rhinosinusitis complicates only about 2% of cases.

Diagnosis

- Although sore throat, nasal symptoms, and cough may be present, there is no prominent symptom or sign.
- Symptoms may last up to 14 days with an average of 7 to 11 days (J Clin Microbiol 1997;35:2864; JAMA 1967;202:158).
- Purulent nasal secretions do not predict bacterial sinusitis unless accompanied by other signs and symptoms of bacterial infection.

Treatment

- Studies have found the common cold resolves without antibiotic treatment.
- Treatment with an antibiotic does not shorten the duration of illness or prevent bacterial rhinosinusitis.
- Patients with purulent green or yellow secretions do not benefit from antibiotic treatment.
- Over-the-counter cough suppressants have limited efficacy for relief of cough due to upper respiratory infection (Chest 2006; 129:95S-103S).
- Acute cough associated with the common cold may be relieved by first-generation antihistamines and decongestants (Chest 2006;129:95S-103S).

TIPS TO REDUCE ANTIBIOTIC USE

- Tell patients that antibiotic use increases the risk of an antibiotic-resistant infection.
- Identify and validate patient concerns.
- Recommend specific symptomatic therapy.
- Spend time answering questions and offer a contingency plan if symptoms worsen.
- Provide patient education materials on antibiotic resistance.
- REMEMBER: Effective communication is more important than an antibiotic for patient satisfaction.
- See www.cdc.gov/getsmart or contact your local health department for more information and patient education materials.

Key Reference